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**On World Day against Trafficking in Persons, Graduate Women International expresses fury over the monstrous crime of trafficking in persons and its impacts on women's and girls' lives**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 30 July 2022** – Human trafficking is a crime that exploits people for monstrous purposes including forced labour and sex. In 2013, the United Nations designated 30 July as the World Day against Trafficking in Persons in order to “raise awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.” Sadly, women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labour, accounting for 99% of victims in the commercial sex industry, and 58% in other sectors (ILO). Graduate Women International (GWI) observes this year's theme, *use and abuse of technology*, by raising awareness on the role of technology as a tool that can both enable and prevent human trafficking and the exploitation of women and girls.

Worldwide, over 40 million people are estimated to be trapped in modern slavery, including 24.9 million in forced labour (ILO). Out of the 24.9 million people trapped in forced labour, 16 million people are exploited in the private sector such as domestic work, construction or agriculture (ILO). On top of these numbers, globally, one in every four victims is a child with young girls representing three quarters of identified child trafficking victims (ILO). These outrageous numbers must be reduced.

“Human trafficking wrecks the lives of millions of women and girls and deprives them of their right to education”, says Terry Oudraad, GWI President. “Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking as a result of gender inequality, resulting in unequal power relationships and abuse which needs to be addressed at its core levels in laws, policies, education and the media”, she adds.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of, and dependence on, technology has expanded and intensified. Everyday life has shifted to online platforms and the dependency on Wi-Fi, creating a sanctuary for traffickers. The internet offers traffickers, tools to recruit, exploit, and control victims. Crisis situations can exacerbate this problem as criminals' profit from the chaos, desperation, and separation of people, particularly women and children, from support systems. Awareness-raising on the safe use of the internet and social media could help mitigate the risk of people falling victim to human trafficking online. In addition, cooperation with the private sector is important for the development of sustainable technology-based solutions to prevent and combat trafficking.

GWI appeals to states and the private sector to partner with local and national authorities and organisations to ensure measures and restrictions are in place which prevent the use of technological platforms as tools for trafficking in order to protect women and girls from this heinous crime.

**About Graduate Women International (GWI)**

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 60 countries. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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